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ABSTRACT

Few preservice and beginning teachers are prepared for the diversity of today's classrooms. Educators must be aware of the many ways in which people are diverse and recognize that diversity is an enormous advantage. By 2010, 40 percent of students will be minorities. U.S. teachers are predominantly middle-class European Americans, yet one in four children (predominantly minorities) lives in poverty. Such statistics challenge teacher training institutions to matriculate teachers who are culturally sensitive and culturally literate. Multicultural education is a reform movement designed to bring about educational equity for all. It helps teachers recognize, accept, and affirm diversity. Culture and cultural diversity are important concepts for educators to understand because they influence students' lives. Culture is shared characteristics of a group of people. Cultural diversity involves differences in those characteristics between groups. The idea that teachers need specific preparation for working effectively with diverse students is not new. Researchers have been examining the issue for decades. Teacher educators are vital in the professional development of preservice teachers. In order for the goals and tenets of multicultural education to be realized in teacher education programs, teacher educators' roles must be more narrowly defined. Teacher educators must assess their own attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge and accept the need to make multicultural education a curricular priority. (Contains 56 references.) (SM)

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TEACHER EDUCATORS' ROLE IN PROMOTING THE TENETS OF MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

(Position Paper)

by

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Mid-South Educational Research Association

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> *If we wish to create a good and humane society, capable of making a contribution to humanity's "coming to its senses", we must create a good and humane state. That means a state that will no longer suppress, humiliate, and deny the free human being, but will serve all the dimensions of that being.* (Havel, 1992, p. 121-122)

Preservice and beginning teachers often talk of the importance of being able to respond to the diverse backgrounds, experiences, abilities, and interests of their soon to be students; yet, few understand or are prepared for the diversity that awaits them in today's classrooms. Traditionally, teachers have been prepared to work with middle-class children from dominant cultural group (Gollnick, 1990). The reality is that demographic differences between teachers and their students are increasing (Grant & Secada, 1990; Hodgkinson, 1997), and teachers have been frustrated by the numbers of students who come from physically, socially, emotionally, and financially stressed homes (Boyer, 1989).

Concomitantly, living in a diverse society requires having an awareness and understanding of the cultural differences not only of the majority, but also the minority culture groups that make up that society. Hodgkinson (1997) reported that "educators need to be increasingly aware of the variety of ways in which people are diverse and recognize that diversity is an enormous advantage for the U.S." (p. 7). This requirement is a requisite for teachers, especially when larger percentages of students in many large and urban school districts come from ethnic and racial culture groups. America's diversification comes with many direct implications for the American educational system (Evans, Torrey, & Newton, 1997).

Demographic Imperatives

Statistics show that by the year 2010, about 40% of the school age population in the United States will be persons of color (Gay, 1993; Gollnick & Chinn, 1998; McIntyre, 1993). In 23 out of the 25 largest school districts in the United States, minority children have already become the majority (Gollnick & Chinn, 1998). A recent report published by the Children's Defense Fund (Sherman, 1994) shows that 16 million American children (or one-in-four) live in poverty. Approximately 33% of black children, 13% of white children, and 35% of Hispanic children live in poverty (Johnson, 1992). Paradoxically, teachers in the United States are drawn predominately from European-American, middle-class backgrounds (Barrett, 1993; Burnstein & Cabello, 1989; Grant & Sleeter, 1989).

One of the implications of the shift in demographics is the challenge and charge to the academy that trains the teachers, to matriculate teachers who are both culturally sensitive and culturally literate. The issue of multicultural education is so important that accrediting organizations such as the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) have encouraged its inclusion in studies for prospective teachers (Barry & Lechner, 1995). Even more important, institutions of higher learning should matriculate teachers who are prepared with a consciousness for diversity, and ready and willing to champion for cultural pluralism and multicultural education (Ladson-Billings, 1994a). Therefore, preservice teachers should become culturally literate and competent in the concepts of multicultural education. Moreover, new teachers should also be mindful that the expressed purpose of public education, according to Ladson-Billings'(1992), is the development of citizens who are prepared to participate in a democracy.

With the twenty-first century pledging a reversal in the demographic makeup of America's classrooms (where children of various ethnic groups will be the majority), Evans, Torrey, and Newton (1997) recommend that teacher educators' priority should be to prepare teachers to work with students from culturally diverse backgrounds. Evans et al. also reported that the preference of teachers is "to teach students from their own cultural orientation, because they share common values, expectations, and experiences" (p. 9). But, Pohan (1995) offered the following reminder:

> With the nation's student population becoming increasingly more diverse, teachers must both be willing and prepared to work with students from backgrounds different from their own. For indeed, if ALL students don't succeed, we fail to meet their nation's democratic ideals and the very purpose of schooling itself. (p. 2)

Additionally, the research of Ladson-Billings (1991), Marshall (1993), and Moore and Reeves-Kazelskis (1992) suggest that most teachers have concerns about working with diverse student populations and need to examine their beliefs, broaden their knowledge, and develop abilities for relating to students from diverse cultures.

What is Multicultural Education?

Multicultural education is the term most often applied to educational programs designed to study concepts that deal with race, culture, language, social class, gender, and disability (Grant & Sleeter, 1993; Sleeter & Grant, 1994). However, Banks (1995) explained that multicultural education is not confined to the issues of race, class, and gender, but to the tenets of a democratic society as professed by the Constitution of the United States and its guarantees for equality for all.

Even though there is much confusion about the meaning of the term multicultural education, there is general agreement on some identifying attributes of the concept. Banks (1992) stated

> there is an emerging consensus among specialists that multicultural education is a reform movement designed to being about educational equity for all students, including those from different races, ethnic groups, social classes, exceptionality, and sexual orientations. We need to create a school environment that is equitable and just; then in our discussions and classrooms, honestly try to search for a balance of views, and present them as fairly as possible. (p. 21)

Banks (1994) contends that the notion of multicultural education consists of three major components: an idea or concept, an educational reform movement, and a process. As an idea or concept, it is believed that all students regardless of race, gender, or social-class should have equal opportunities for a quality education. As an educational reform movement, multicultural education proponents are working for reform within schools so that all children will be given opportunities to learn. And finally, since one of the major goals of multicultural education is to create within schools and society the democratic ideals of liberty and justice for all, working toward this goal through multicultural education is a never ending process.

Further, Banks (1994) has identified five dimensions of multicultural education. They are: (a) content integration, (b) the knowledge construction process, (c) prejudice reduction, (d) an equity pedagogy, and an (e) empowering school culture and social structure. Solomon (1996) states that although

> multicultural education is an effort to reflect the growing diversity of America's classrooms, many programs move beyond curricular revisions to specifically address the academic needs of

> carefully defined groups of students, often minority students. Primarily, as Banks notes, while curricular programs attempt to increase the body of knowledge about different ethnic, cultural, and gender groups, student-oriented programs are intended to increase the academic achievement of these groups, even when they do not involve extensive changes in the content of the curriculum. (p. 83)

Banks further characterized the challenge as one of seeking common ground for all people without imposing the one on the many. To Banks,

> People on the margins must participate. We must validate their dreams and struggles, and they must participate in shaping the *unum*. So many blacks don't feel a part of this country, so many Hispanics, so many poor whites. Yet all of our fates are tied together. We talk about kids who are at risk, but I think we are all at risk if we don't create a society that is united within a framework of shared values, like democracy and equality. And that is what multicultural education is all about. It's really an education for freedom, freedom for all of us. (p. 23)

Bennett (1999) defined multicultural education as an approach to teaching and learning that has as its foundation democratic values and beliefs. She assembled the terms movement, approach, process, and commitment to explain her definition of multicultural education. As a movement, multicultural education restructures the entire school climate so that teaching techniques, teacher expectations, discipline programs, and home/school/community relationships will all reflect an atmosphere supportive of learning for all children. Ethnic minorities and children of lower socioeconomic circumstances will find the restructured school to exhibit high scholastic expectations in addition to a confirmation of diversity. Bennett's approach signifies a curriculum with an all encompassing focus, in which a knowledge base that will integrate the histories and contributions of ethnic groups into the present curriculum is provided. According to Bennett, the process of multiculturalism moves individuals from ethnocentric viewpoints to more inclusive views of multicultural education and ultimately to global perspectives. For Bennett, multicultural education should be viewed as a commitment to affirm and appreciate cultural diversity.

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Although the concept of multicultural education is very complex, it is the term most often used to describe education policies and practices. Multicultural education is a mechanism by which teachers can recognize, accept, and affirm diversity as it relates to race, culture, language, social class, gender, and disability.

Culture and Cultural Diversity Defined

Culture and cultural diversity are important concepts for educators to understand because they influence students' lives. Culture is those shared characteristics of a group of people such as, language, religion, habits of dress, customs and traditions, and ways of thinking and behaving (Banks, 1992). Culture, thereby, teaches and shapes student's identities, beliefs, and behaviors (Gollnick & Chinn, 1998). At the same time, it is important to note that there is a great deal of overlap between the definitions of the terms cultural diversity and multicultural education. Moreover, it is important for preservice teachers and their educators to realize not only the complexities in the areas of cultural diversity and multicultural education, but also the difficulty of definitively defining them.

Cushner, McClelland, and Safford (1992) described diversity as a concept expanded "to include differences based on gender, ethnicity, race, class, age, and handicapping condition" (p. xvii). Diversity is not equated "with a notion of "other". . . that all Americans are, to some degree, multicultural because they live in a multicultural society" (p. xvii). It was believed by Shapiro, Sewell, and DuCette (1995) "the most defensible position for educators is to use the term diversity. . . . that multicultural education, while very similar to diversity, is not synonymous with it, but is rather a subset of this more inclusive area" (p. 2). Thereby, DuCette, Shapiro, and Sewell (1996) defined diversity as

> . . . encompassing the domain of human characteristics which affect an individual's capacity to learn from, respond to, or interact in a school environment. These characteristics can be overt or covert, recognized by the individual or not recognized, and biologically or environmentally or socially determined. Some of the characteristics are meaningful only as they describe an individual; others are more meaningful as they describe a group. (p. 324)

Being aware of and sensitive to not only the differences in cultures, but also how cultures impact learning is a need for every teacher, regardless of who they teach. Dean Corrigan (1990), Chair of the Multicultural Education Research Committee at Texas A & M University, declared that it should be obvious "that the preparation of any teacher, of any subject, and for any level must include the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to completely reach and teach students of increasingly diverse backgrounds" (p. 3).

In summary, culture is those shared characteristics of a group of people. Diversity, on the other hand, is the differences in those characteristics between groups. And cultural diversity is a concept very closely tied to the tenets of multicultural education which may directly impact how children learn. Hence, culture, cultural diversity, and multicultural education are concepts with which all teachers should be aware.

Multicultural Teacher Education Curricula

The challenge for teaching in a "more complex, knowledge-based, and multicultural society" (p. 196), according to Darling-Hammond (1996), comes with

> . . . new expectations for teaching. To help diverse learners master more challenging content, teachers must go far beyond dispensing information, giving a test, and giving a grade. They must themselves know their subject areas deeply, and they must understand how students think, if they are to create experiences that actually work to produce learning. (p. 194)

The idea that teachers need specific preparation in order to work effectively with a diverse population is not new. Goodwin (1997) reported that the concept of including "cultural diversity training in preservice teacher education programs" (p. 9) began to surface in the 1970s. Gay (1977) outlined three components for multicultural teacher education—knowledge, whereby "teachers become literate about ethnic group experiences" (p. 34); attitudes "to help teachers examine their existing attitudes and feelings toward ethnic, racial, and cultural differences" (p. 43); and skills "to translate their knowledge and sensitivities into school programs, curricular designs, and classroom instructional practices" (p. 48).

Burstein and Cabello (1989) reported that "the teaching profession is overwhelmingly white (89.7% in 1986), and its percentage of minority teachers has declined significantly over the last decade. Moreover, many teachers come from middle-class backgrounds, unlike their students" (p. 9). More specifically, according to Pine and Hilliard (1990), by the year 2000, the "proportion of minority teachers in the public schools will drop from 12% to 5%" (p. 597). Sleeter (1990) affirmed that in light of the "whitening of the teaching force will not bode well for multicultural education, because . . . the impact on public schooling—and particularly on schooling for children of color—of declining numbers of teachers of color will be great" (p. 37). To Banks (1992), teachers are the keepers of the keys to freedom. As the teacher population becomes more monocultural and student population, more multicultural, the needs for teachers to be more culturally sensitive toward students with backgrounds different from their own, is apparent. To summarize, the browning of America, in contrast to the whitening of the teaching force, indicates the need for a multicultural teacher education curricula. Future teachers will be faced with more challenges in the classroom that, according to Gay (1993), will require multicultural knowledge, attitudes, and skills.

Delpit (1995) believed it is the responsibility of teacher educators to help preservice teachers become culturally literate and competent. One of the first steps in doing this is to help preservice teachers reach a level of awareness of themselves and their relationship with the world. They must come to a basic understanding of who we are and how we are connected to and disconnected from one another. Teachers should recognize that

> we all carry worlds in our heads, and those worlds are decidedly different. We educators set out to teach, but how can we reach the worlds of others when we don't even know they exist? Indeed, many of us don't even realize that our own worlds exist only in our heads and in the cultural institutions we have built to support them. (p. xiv)

It is further recommended by Delpit (1995) that, in addition to teachers exploring their own beliefs and attitudes about diverse cultures, they should also be exposed to models for success and successful teaching rather than prescriptions for failure. Research has indicated that students' performance and

achievement is directly related to teacher's beliefs. Low expectations of, and negative attitudes toward, students result in low achievement (Ladson-Billings, 1994a).

As the demographics of the United States continue to change, these changes create what Banks (1991) refers to as the "demographic imperative," a situation which requires classroom teachers to be more responsive to an increasingly diverse population. In corroboration, teacher educators are reminded by Larke (1990) that, "Educating teachers to be culturally sensitive is a challenge facing teacher education programs. Historically, teacher education programs have educated preservice teachers to work effectively with one socioeconomic group (middle class) and one culture, the dominant culture" (p. 23).

The demand for educational equity for all students also require an awareness that different cultures may require different teaching practices. However, the need for different teaching strategies or practices cannot be accommodated when teachers are not aware of, or sensitive to, what those needs are. Additionally, an awareness and acceptance of the diversities of culture demand that teachers be culturally literate. Cultural literacy means being conversant with the basic ideas, issues, personalities, and events that reflect perspectives and experiences other than those of the dominant culture. With this literacy comes cultural competence, whereby teachers can argue for the changes in the curriculum that will enable students to challenge the mainstream, challenge the societal inequities, and help all students to develop accurate self-knowledge within a humane national culture (Ladson-Billings, 1992).

Notwithstanding, teacher educators are admonished by Tatto (1996) to remain mindful that

> Not only do teacher beliefs influence their teaching practices, these beliefs are relatively stable and resistant to change. If teacher educators are striving to help teachers learn practices teachers do not value, it is likely that teacher education will not have much effect. These findings, combined with studies of the content of teacher education, make it more clear that an important goal of many teacher education programs ought to be to alter teachers' beliefs. (p. 157)

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Role of Teacher Educators

Teacher educators play a vital role in the professional development of preservice teachers. Teacher education faculty are the heart of teacher education as they design, implement, and assess curricular programs. Teacher educators are responsible for "knowing what to teach (content) and how to teach it (pedagogy)" (Edwards, 1997, p. 44). If preservice teachers are to become culturally literate and sensitive, it will be because of the efforts of teacher educators. In essence it is encumbered upon teacher educators to take preservice teacher on what Edwards (1997) called "a cultural journey" (p. 44).

Barry and Lechner (1995) reported that "several studies in recent years concluded that preservice teachers are not being prepared to deal with the challenges of multicultural/cross-cultural education. Preservice teachers feel inadequate to deal with either cognitive or effective aspects of multicultural education" (p. 150). Likewise, Bell, Washington, Weinstein, and Love (1997) reported that faculty's professional training has not prepared them to "address emotional and socially charged issues in the classroom (p. 299). Weinstein and Obear (1992) found that university faculty colleagues from different disciplines, when asked to respond to the question "What makes you nervous about raising issues of racism in your classroom?" expressed several concerns. In their study, faculty expressed heightened awareness about their social identities that required them to be more conscious of their attitudes and assumptions, and raised feelings of guilt, shame, or embarrassment at behaviors and attitudes of their own social group(s). These faculty members, in the Weinstein and Obear study, were also fearful of being labeled racist, sexist, homophobic and so on, or discovering previously unrecognized prejudices within themselves. They also expressed anxiety about how ro respond to biased comments in the classroom and often worried about having to expose their own struggles with the issues, reveal uncertainty, or make mistakes. But, most importantly for the faculty members in the Weinstein and Obear study, they expressed fear related to institutional risks involved in departing from traditional teaching formats and content.

Multicultural education is not simply new content but often a radical change in process as well. "Among educators there has to be an acknowledgment that any effort to transform institutions so that they

reflect a multicultural standpoint must take into consideration the fears teachers have when asked to shift their paradigms" (hooks, 1994, p. 36). Garcia and Pugh (1992) reported that, despite unequivocal mandates of NCATE, the majority of teacher education faculty see cultural pluralism, and consequently multicultural education as a minority or civil rights issue rather than an issue relevant to the whole of society. Further, many faculty feel unqualified to deal with the issues, and thus avoid them. Essentially, Melnick and Zeichner (1995) determined that "teacher educators . . . are limited in cross-cultural experiences and understandings—they are overwhelmingly Caucasian and monolingual and culturally encapsulated" (p. 2).

Another issue discovered by Tierney and Bensimon (1996) is that "the vast majority of individuals who teach diversity-related courses are those who are considered "diverse." . . . with the small number of faculty of color and women" (p. 343) this is problematic. Tierney and Bensimon concluded that when one group of faculty are expected to teach a particular series of courses, the "mainstream group of faculty often feel as if those courses are unimportant and unnecessary" (p. 343). Consequently, the faculty teaching diversity-related courses do not receive adequate support and thereby "multicultural classes" are relegated to "a ghetto where other (mainstream) faculty dare not tread," (p. 343).

Tatto (1996) explored the "beliefs of both student teachers and their teacher educators regarding the teaching of diverse students and the conceptions of success and failure teachers hold toward diverse students" (p. 157). Tatto asked three questions in her paper:

> (1) to what extent do teacher educators themselves subscribe to a shared set of beliefs about student diversity and teaching? (2) to what extent do student teachers hold different beliefs than those of their professors? (3) to what extent do student teachers' views change in the direction of their faculty's views as students participate in teacher education programs? (p. 157)

Hence, it was one of Tatto's hypotheses that "to socialize student teachers effectively regarding student diversity, teacher education programs need to have a set of rules or norms of discourse within which teaching and learning occurs. . . ." (p. 157).

It was further surmised by Tatto (1996) that teacher educators have formed their own subculture, wherein there are shared beliefs, views, and values about professional rules and norms, beliefs about issues about teaching diverse students, students' success and failure, and how teachers should respond to dilemmas of practice. The concern is not that this subculture may have its "own professional norms for teaching," (but, that they) "may try to inculcate these values in their students" (p. 158).

There is a call for preservice teacher education programs and teacher educators to make multicultural education a curricular priority by assessing the needs of prospective teachers and fulfilling those needs at all costs. Trent (1990) called for the inclusion of "scholarship on race and ethnicity as a core part of the preparation of the nation's teachers" (p. 360) and provides three reasons:

1. The student body is becoming more diverse.

2. The economic future of the nation depends on meeting the educational needs of this diverse population.

3. The teaching force is becoming more female and more white.

A recommendation of Miranda and Scott (1994) is for colleges and universities

> to adopt a core of multicultural education requirements that will provide future teachers with both general and specific multicultural education knowledge, extending from broad coverage of multicultural education issues to classes and experiences that will build knowledge about specific cultural/racial groups in a variety of content areas. (p. 51)

For teacher educators to address the needs of preservice teachers, it would be helpful to understand where they are in order to direct their paths toward a cultural consciousness. Carter G. Woodson (1933) admonished teachers to discover their students' background as a way to explore their responsibilities. More than 60 years later, Woodson's words have gone unheeded. Neither the content of teacher education curricula nor the role of teacher educators has been designed or defined to address the following questions posed by Webb (1998):

1. How can we assess the curriculum to insure that it reflects the culture, experiences, and contributions of diverse persons?

2. How do my own attitudes about the potential of diverse students influence my personal teaching style and classroom behavior?

3. In what ways can the learner's frame of reference help him or her in learning and applying new content?

4. What do we know about diverse others and their cultures that can be used to inspire and empower students to achieve greater academic success?

Teacher education involves more than the transfer of infomation from teacher educator to preservice teacher. It involves what Melnick and Zeichner (1995) describes as a "profound transformation of people and of world views and assumptions that they have carried with them for their entire lives" (p. 14). As Nieto (1996) says, an important part of becoming a multicultural teacher is becoming a multicultural person. This kind of transformation is beyond the current capabilities of most teacher educators. For teacher educators to make such a transformation, they would have to make major additions to their knowledge base, become more aware of their own cultural orientation, and increase their sensitivity about their own behavioral approaches to diverse groups (Shade, 1995).

In order for the tenets and goals of multicultural education to be realized in teacher education programs, the role of teacher educators will have to be more narrowly defined. The consensus in the literature is that it is the duty of teacher educators to practice what they preach. Further, researchers who have explored teacher development in the area of multicultural education agree that movement toward a multicultural perspective begins with individual knowledge and awareness (Gay, 1977; Sleeter, 1992). They argue that in considering professional development in this area, preservice teachers need to first explore their knowledge and awareness before they look at teaching skills and strategies. Such continua, from the acquisition of knowledge and awareness through to implementation, appear often in the discussion of teacher preparation (Banks, 1994; Banks & Banks, 1989; Cushner, McClelland, & Safford, 1996; Grant & Sleeter, 1989). Burstein and Cabello (1989) include reflection as the final step, arguing that teachers need an opportunity to consider their practice where diversity is concerned and to share their experiences and efforts with colleagues. Sleeter (1992) believes that teachers must first become aware of

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the basic issues that support a need for multicultural education. She presents four primary categories of the needs that teachers have to become effective at multicultural education: "teachers must develop a knowledge base about cultural diversity, acceptance of cultural differences and a commitment to serve cultural minority communities, and skills for translating multicultural education into action in the classroom" (p. 33). If teacher educators are to be effective at advocating the goals and tenets of multicultural education they must be held to the same standard they hold for preservice teachers.

The ultimate goal should be for preservice teachers to recognize conscientiously the need for cultural diversity, justice, and respect for all. With this in mind, it should be the desire of teacher educators to create what Delpit (1995) calls a good teacher, a teacher who will "communicate with, observe, and get to know their students and the students' cultural background" (p. 118); not teachers who are afraid and/or incapable of establishing what Bogardus (1933b) calls "a small degree of social distance or *social nearness*" *(p. 462)* with their students. Summarily, the necessity of preparing all preservice teachers to work with culturally diverse students in culturally diverse settings should be clear. What may be less clear is how teacher educators will assume their role to this end. The imperative for teacher education is the inclusion of multicultural education in the curriculum. Further, the role of teacher educators in this process will require them to do several things. They must examine their own beliefs about diversity issues, enhance their awareness of the tenets and concepts of cultural diversity, and become proactive in meeting the mandates established by NCATE.

The United States is often called a nation of immigrants. As such, our American society is in the midst of a cultural revolution, wherein the demographic makeup is rapidly changing. With these changes come a cultural reversal, not only in our society, but also in the classrooms. It is projected that children of color will be the majority in the classroom, while on the other hand, there will more teachers of European American descent. With these changes will come a greater need for cultural awareness and sensitivity, for preservice and inservice teachers and their teacher educators.

Additionally, the role of teacher educators in addressing these needs has become more apparent. To confront the parochialism of preservice teachers, teacher educators will need to view cultural pluralism

and the issues and tenets of multicultural education in a different light. But, first, teacher educators will need to assess their own attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge of this subject. Second, they will accept the need to make multicultural education a curricular priority. And finally, they commit to the challenge of meeting, not only mandated standards of NCATE, but also the needs of preservice teachers.

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